DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 494 HE 031 943

AUTHOR Mullen, Carol A.; Whatley, April; Kealy, William A.
TITLE Co-Mentoring Support Groups in Higher Education.
PUB DATE 1999-02-28
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *College Faculty; Educational Research; *Graduate Students; *Group Dynamics; *Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; *Mentors; Models; Qualitative Research; Schools of Education; *Social Support Groups; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model for a co-mentoring support group among graduate students and faculty, using as a case study the development of a faculty-student support group in a college of education at a university. This support group began in 1995 and consisted of 11 participants who met formally for one year and have continued to meet informally since that time. Over time, the members created solidarity by describing personal research questions and preferred methodologies, and by sharing the impact of the changing direction of school leadership on their work. It is concluded that faculty-student support groups can provide a viable context for identifying salient mentoring themes, for envisioning them in constructive and holistic terms, and for experimenting with role playing as co-mentors. In addition, an expanded definition of mentoring can facilitate mentor identity development and deepen the capacity for human connection, and an understanding of broader socialization patterns can make explicit issues of mentorship and identity formation. A focus on self-study with others can create conditions for heightened motivation and ongoing learning. (Contains 43 references.) (MDM)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

Running head: CO-MENTORING SUPPORT GROUPS

ED 429 494

# CO-MENTORING SUPPORT GROUPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Carol A. Mullen, April Whatley, and William A. Kealy

28 February 1999

Institutional Affiliation:

Correspondence to: Carol A. Mullen
Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology
4036 Haley Center
College of Education
Auburn University, AL 36849-5221

Office Phone: (334) 844-3076
Office Fax: (334) 844-3072
Email: mulleca@mail.auburn.edu

April Whatley
Assistant Professor
Department of Education and Human Sciences
Berry College
P.O. Box 49501
Rome, GA 30165 USA

Office Phone: (706) 802-6734
Office Fax: (706) 238-7827
E-mail: awhatley@berry.edu

William A. Kealy
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Research
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4453

Office Phone: (850) 644-1618
Office Fax: (850) 644-5803
E-mail: wkealy@cpt.fsu.edu

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IHE 631 943

Carol A. Mullen

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

# CO-MENTORING SUPPORT GROUPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION


## Abstract

Faculty-student support groups have the potential to promote strategies for co-mentorship in places of learning. They can also function to facilitate alternative forms of pedagogical practice in the context of lifelong learning. The purpose of this paper is to describe ideas and practices in the innovative development of faculty-student support groups in higher education. The authors provide a context for introducing the model of a co-mentoring support group; for considering institutional dynamics in forming co-mentoring support groups; for illustrating a case study analysis of a university-based support group; for providing a collegial response to the mentoring literature; for considering the need to formalize mentoring programs and outcomes; for exploring challenges to and benefits of the support group effort, and finally for envisioning co-mentoring support groups more generally. The authors argue that more attention needs to be given to studying alternative pedagogical practices that enable mutualistic relationships to endure. This paper accordingly offers an original holistic guide for viewing mentoring as interconnected cycles and phases of lifelong learning.


KEYWORDS: faculty-student support group, higher education, co-mentorship, innovative practice, reflective self-study, collaborative inquiry, professional development, lifelong learning, traditional mentorship, holistic life-system.

## Introducing a Co-Mentoring Support Group Model

This paper is concerned with the subject of co-mentorship as facilitated by support groups in higher education. It describes ideas in developing and representing faculty-student support groups as an alternative form of pedagogical practice. Individuals belonging to such groups can function proactively to co-mentor and to assist one another's learning. The support group can aim to reconstruct traditional one-to-one mentoring relationships; sustain development among members even where political controversy and transition are issues; and reinforce co-mentoring as a process of lifelong learning. We define the faculty-student support group, then, as a co-mentoring collegial network that brings together persons across differences who are committed to the professional development of all members.

This discussion will focus on a faculty-student support group that we, three of its members, helped to develop in a higher education context in a large public institution in the United States. We provide a context for 1) considering institutional dynamics in forming co-mentoring support groups; 2) illustrating a case study analysis of such a group; 3) providing a collegial response to the mentoring literature; 4) considering the need to formalize mentoring programs and outcomes; 5) exploring challenges to and benefits of the support group effort, and, finally, 6) envisioning support groups more generally. We argue that more attention needs to be given to studying alternative pedagogical practices that enable mutualistic relationships to endure. This paper accordingly offers an original holistic guide for viewing mentoring as interconnected cycles and phases of lifelong learning[1] (see Figure 1).

In this paper we ask: What is the purpose, effect, and benefit of establishing mutualistic relationships among faculty and graduate students across differences in rank, status, gender, and experience? Also, we wonder how co-mentoring support groups can be represented to serve as a model for those interested in pursuing this action-based practice in their own context.

## Institutional Dynamics and the Co-mentoring Support Group

Faculty-student support groups have been known to form in response to serious administrative changes taking place within university departments and colleges of education. Such local changes provide the impetus for individuals to further college-wide vision for change. Graduate students may worry about the consequences of new leadership on their learning where, for example, the range of permissible dissertation topics (and methods) becomes restricted or where faculty considered suitable for mentorship becomes fewer. Female minority mentors, or those practicing alternative forms of research, may experience their mentoring status and efforts diminished during such times. Knowledge building among women and men is an important tool for evolving social structures required for progressive, communal life within educational settings. We, the co-authors of this paper, are female and male representatives of the support group who agree with Wunsch (1993) that "mentoring cannot be viewed as a compensatory programme for women only. Effecting structural and attitudinal change in the institution also requires the participation of men" (p. 353). We hope that legitimacy of inclusive mentoring perspectives will give license to men who are inclined toward similar practice (see, e.g., Luke, 1994).

Although apprehension may be the catalyst for individuals seeking guidance, support groups can nonetheless function as mentoring programs that ensure professional growth. Junior level faculty may seek "forced mentorship" where departmental actions threaten to impact negatively on freedom with experimentation in teaching and research. The desire for continued employment facing many "gypsy profs" (Hardigg, 1995) may also steer the contractual and untenured toward others for support. Senior or established faculty also need to experience the benefits of mentoring, but they may feel reluctant to actively seek support from an unauthorized network. The general perception may be that the mentoring needs of tenured faculty have already been fulfilled in the form of expert-like approaches to intellectual tasks. As a senior-level male professor and participant in our group asserted:

> Mutualistic relationships are not easy to establish. . . . They require the mentor's inclination to challenge not just the abstract notion of hierarchy but one's own privileged place in a particular hierarchy. . . . I remember my first doctoral advisee bringing these points home to me in a way I could not ignore. . . . I doubt that I or anyone else ever completely outgrows that need to examine ourselves and bring our actions into line with what we claim to believe.[2]

Using this example, collegial networks can organize inquiry to "challenge the abstract notion of hierarchy" and "one's own privileged place in a particular hierarchy" as well as the need "to examine ourselves and bring our actions into line with what we claim to believe." Such forms of reflective self-study are conducive to promoting co-mentoring or non-authoritarian structures of learning.

Although university-based support groups may not begin as a formalized mentoring program, they can nevertheless be studied as an innovative educational program. The support group structure can enable participants to reconceptualize their institutional mentoring roles and to practice more enriching and expansive ones as co-mentors. Mutually beneficial practices can prove to be a creative and satisfying response to the isolation, competition, and even exploitation experienced at times by faculty and students in their daily contexts. It follows that collegial networks can provide not only vocational strategies for success but also intensive forms of personal and professional guidance.

## Case Study Analysis of a Co-mentoring Support Group

In 1995, doctoral students along with faculty, all of whom had been connected through coursework, dissertation committees, supervisory relationships, and friendships, gathered. Although individuals shared these origins, we had yet to experience being part of a research team that was committed to each person's professional development and well-being. The self-study group consisted of 11 female and male participants who met for one year formally and since informally. Serious administrative changes had then taken place in our immediate setting that provided the impetus for individuals to meet. As one student participant conceptualized these transitions:

> Last fall, our department and college underwent changes in leadership. I felt uneasy with the rapid return to very traditional ways of doing bureaucracy that came along with these administrative changes. Some of us had recently been exposed to the concepts of narrative self-study. We expressed interest in pursuing this type of research even though it is not commonly practiced in our department. We also began to question the impersonal voice of academic discourse and an authoritarian structure of teaching, and we were able to identify faculty members who would be open to our concerns.

Those who came to that initial meeting were seeking constructive ways to function in a context of serious college-wide political turmoil and a subsequent loss of morale. We met, then, to establish support in an effort to break through our "circles of one," or worlds of professional isolation. It became clear that the group itself could serve as a mechanism for facilitating our writing and research agendas at both independent and shared levels. The decision to make use of our differences proved key to the mindful distribution that resulted in accommodating all relevant contributions.

Over time members created solidarity by describing personal research questions and preferred methodologies, and by sharing the impact of the changing direction of leadership on our work. Student participants were acquainted through professors at various stages of career, including a beginning professor who adopted innovative teaching methods in her courses. This professor, a recent immigrant, had been invited to the support group by her former doctoral students. They felt that the conservative forces of the college might restrict her exploratory, narrative approach to philosophical systems in human development. The beginning professor shared her motivation for actively mentoring students:

> I believe that doctoral students are generally not taught how to become teacher educator-researchers or mentors in a chosen academic field. Nor do they typically engage in conversations about how to develop their own mentor identity or how to promote that of others. Despite the emphasis on autobiography in circles of academic narrative discourse, this strand of development is under-acknowledged. Is the process of teacher educator development so obvious

in its shaping influence that it is not worthy of attention? What would happen if strong mentoring networks were created to promote a robust sense of mentor identity?

These phases have come full circle. We, the co-authors, represent the former faculty-student membership distribution of our network. The co-mentoring group of graduate students, beginning professors of education, and experienced tenured professors represented diversity across subject areas, throughout various levels of education, and within our own lives. Differences were evident by our institutional status, range of experience, cultural and racial identity, subject emphasis in education, scholastic inclination, gender, age, style of interaction, life circumstances, and economic well-being.

Our degree of commitment to the process and aims of the group also differed. As an example, for some members, the group was primarily an emotional vehicle for personal sharing and support whereas for others it was primarily a research tool for collaborative discussion and productivity. This kind of unevenness is to be distinguished from what Slavin (1995) describes as the "free rider effect." This form of imbalance in contribution results from an unequal situation when "some group members do all or most of the work (and learning) while others go along for the ride" (p. 19). The concept of the free rider effect can easily be applied to some collaborative groups; however, the one we are analyzing was successful partly because of this unevenness which ensured that both our personal and professional development needs were being met. At the center of the participation of each member was the need for the kinds of mentoring processes that can serve as structures to foster healthy, collaborative relationships, even within restrictive academic settings.

We had not met with a fully articulated agenda, purpose, or mission in mind. Just the opposite. The stimulation, encouragement, and mentorship that we had been experiencing with each other, in various contexts, became central to our desire to gather on a biweekly basis. Spontaneous and daily interactions among us provided material for analysis by the formal group. Informally, we processed the dynamics within and direction of the group. We talked specifically about how we could reconcile the gap between our self-perception as a group and our representation throughout the college.

The purpose of our co-mentoring group was shaped over time--but we had to constantly ask what we were trying to do while coping with feelings of frustration. At each meeting the issue of what our perspective on mentoring might be, or come to be, was formulated. We made advances with the help of note-taking, session taping, and informal talk. The rough edges of our search coincided with the processing of told (as in published) and untold (as in personal) stories of mentoring. We also probed unanticipated questions and responses. Weary but patient, we were doing the work of being a support group. In retrospect, we had unknowingly shaped a process of co-mentorship while we were trying to discover our deeper purpose and shared intentions. This pursuit of a language to describe our collegial network experience drove the substance of much of our talk. Conversely, without such language, the practice of collaborative mentorship is sometimes "impoverished . . . hierarchical, and dichotomous" (Bona, Rinehart, & Volbrecht, 1995, p. 119).

Traditional mentoring roles defined our institutional relationships as mentors and protégés, but had fallen short of satisfying our multiple demands for professional development and lifelong learning. Traditional mentorship in education can be characterized as a relationship in which professors guide, facilitate, and transfer experiences and knowledge to apprentices, students, and junior-level faculty. Such an approach to mentoring values relationships based on higher authority or expert knowledge. While a traditional "Mentoring-Empowered Model" may promote graduate student advisement, for example, it also creates a polarity between the strengths of advisors and needs of students (Selke & Wong, 1993).

While expert-novice approaches to guiding individuals provide needed support at times, there are many instances when a view of mentorship reflecting a flexible, interactive process is more appropriate. The mainstream academic definition of mentoring is being expanded here to include interaction among co-inquirers invested in researching their own practices. We borrow from other faculty-student groups who have also developed their own language of mentoring. Notably, a women's studies class defined their development as a process of co-mentoring which "gives a name to supportive assistance provided

by several connected individuals. Placing the prefix 'co' before 'mentoring' reconstructs the relationship as nonhierarchical; 'co' makes mentoring reciprocal and mutual" (Bona, Rinehart, & Volbrecht, 1995, p. 119). Similarly, Heinrich (1995) uses "wo-mentoring," and Jipson and Munro (1997), "wo/mentoring," to describe female mentoring relationships within institutional contexts of male lineage. Descriptions of mentoring by Krupp (1992) and Wunsch (1993), with theorizing by Noddings (1995), focus on trust, reciprocity, and mutuality, which partly characterize the synergy of our support group.

Participants had in common the desire to seek support for specific forms of guidance not readily available in our former university setting. As one student member commented:

> Graduate students preparing to become teachers educators need the support and counsel of seasoned professionals. The circle of one, isolation, can be broken when educators acknowledge the legacy they can endow to the next generation. Learning to be an academic professional was modeled for us daily by the explicit and implicit messages that we receive from faculty members. You need to publish was one explicit message, but no specific advice was forthcoming. . . . I seriously doubt that the demands of academia permit any one person to be all things to any of us.

Students who would traditionally assume the protégé role received guidance from members with varied backgrounds and cultural perspectives. By having the opportunity to clarify their unique mentoring needs, they were able to draw specific strengths from each person. Finally, as former teachers, our graduate student participants had mentored undergraduate students, public school students, student teachers, and beginning teachers. Students were invited, then, to teach faculty--everyone was seeking new ways to mentor. An important lesson learned was that individuals may not outgrow the need for mentoring in its myriad of forms. Indeed, mentoring itself needs to have a respectful place in educational models.

In the group we dialogued about the importance of developing co-mentoring support systems that benefit from the knowledge gained from the life experiences of protégés and mentors. We told

personal stories about mentoring figures and lineage as well as critical incidents and moments. We also shared frustrations and expressed joy, and analyzed mentoring theories and writings in education. Dissertation candidates, we agreed, needed to be guided beyond the work of an acceptable research study to become contributory members of the profession. Faculty accordingly shared aspects of their own professional development journeys, enabling others to better understand complex conditions in the academy. Junior- and mid-level faculty who had written for publication shared journal articles that had emerged from previous mentoring contexts. They described some of the dynamics and politics of co-authorship, and offered information about journal manuscript preparation and the review process. Senior members shared multiple aspects of their roles as leaders. Tensions surrounding advocacy for doctoral students engaged in alternative (i.e., life history and narrative) forms of study were described. As a group, we liberated one another's most influential mentoring stories and used them as material for pursuing new patterns of mentoring within established university systems.

We later focused on a way to turn the collection of writings into chapters for a book on mentoring for a new partnership culture in education (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 1997). An agreed-upon but open narrative structure included critical incidents, questions to ponder, retrospectives, musings for mentors, and lessons learned. We also discussed the need for a different kind of organic structure in education that would present a view of mentoring as lifelong learning. Mentoring, when viewed holistically, is a life-system. This can be identified by key phases and cycles (see Figure 1) that ideally respond with flexibility to human differences, obstacles, and changes in sociopolitical climate, mentoring needs, and life circumstances.

College-wide changes in leadership resulted in the dispersion, in less than two years, of our members with the exception of those completing doctorates. Those of us in the "core" group were women. One male joined sporadically and another became committed later once we "disbanded" and developed into an electronically-based network. These two males understandably felt ambivalent as membership was held suspect by non-members holding administrative positions. But the college

administration itself later validated the co-mentoring group not as a political forum but as an exercise in egalitarian mentorship.

Despite the controversy surrounding the meaning and operation of our group, we persevered, finding that: "Collaborative projects draw in individuals who have previously not been involved and who might not have considered starting [such] a research program. By broadening the circle of individuals doing research and writing, more perspectives and voices are heard" (Hafernik, Messerschmitt, & Vandrick, 1997, p. 34). Our iterative phases of learning and productivity include reflective self-study, collaborative inquiry, individual and joint publication, professional development activity (e.g., conference proposal writing and presentation), and career and academic planning (e.g., grant proposal writing, contract negotiation, and university employment). Throughout these developments, research stories have been produced (this article is an example) that bring together different configurations of members committed to furthering new directions in co-mentoring practice.

Mentoring, ranging from sponsorship to reciprocity, defines our practice. By sponsorship we refer to the formal mentoring support system and roles that mentors perform (e.g., dissertation supervisor, project coordinator, editor, and publisher). Levels of sponsorship among us varied according to rank, status, and experience and also according to the needs and interests of protégés embarking on a research and teaching career. On a more nuanced level, we define reciprocity as the mutual sharing of lives that uncovers insight into and knowledge about human experience and ultimately about the research-teaching enterprise itself. There exists a need for studies of innovative support group practices in higher education that impact on the mentoring socialization of individuals.

## A Collegial Response to the Mentoring Literature

In this section we draw on studies of mentoring socialization particularly involving female academics. Over the past 20 years, there has been a "dramatic rebirth" of interest in studying mentorship "as a practical and effective method for developing personnel" (Fleming, 1991, p. 27). With the increase of women in all professions and the predicted "feminization of leadership" (Smith & Smits, 1994), there

is an urgent need to understand the role of mentorship in women's lives and their specific needs. Although more women than ever before obtain advanced degrees in education, "little is known about women doctoral students' experiences, and even less is understood about doctoral advisory relationships between women" (Heinrich, 1995, p. 448). Our group facilitated the development of women at various career stages, providing opportunity for study of precisely those relationships about which more needs to be learned.

We explored the growing trend of narrative and life history research for insight into the process of studying our own practice as teacher educator-researchers. There exists an increasing, but nonetheless underrepresented, personal history literature of professors and the graduate school experience (e.g., Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993; Mullen & Dalton, 1996; Salmon, 1992). This sparse literature seems to confirm that those in higher education are not typically engaged in discussion about mentorship and mentor identity formation within learning communities. Collectively, we wondered why mentoring socialization is not a subject of concern in the literature or even within academies (Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991), especially given its impact on people's lives. Might it be that the rhetoric of educational reform continues to outpace conceptual development and evaluation (Little, 1990)? In response, our support group strove to make explicit what we were learning and the ways we co-mentored. A special effort was required given that the process of mentoring had previously been taken-for-granted by us. Generally, educators speak about mentorship and collegiality as if they were self-evident relationships, when in fact they come in a variety of forms and have disparate consequences.

Initially, such critical reflection about just what our group was doing was difficult to capture because we lacked a language of co-mentorship. We did not fit the traditional definition of mentoring in which "an older experienced person (mentor) sponsors a younger promising associate (protégé or mentee)" to promote professional skills (Fleming, 1991, p. 27). Within this framework, mentoring is a unidirectional, one-to-one process wherein the more experienced (usually older) person does the teaching and the neophyte, the learning. The traditional mentor may set conditions for non-critical reflection

whereby authoritative knowledge is mediated and "satisfaction and recognition [is gained] from the accomplishments of his [or her] protégé" (Fleming, p. 28). We embodied a different understanding of mentoring appreciated only through the practice of being a support group reflecting on itself.

Mutually beneficial practices ironically make the study of co-mentoring more difficult. As Sandler (1995) so aptly indicates, it is "hard to know how many people actually have had mentors because supportive relationships with friends, colleagues, or bosses may be described as 'personal' relationships rather than as mentoring, especially when women assist women" (p. 105). Developing an understanding of what occurs in collegial groups offers promise for the practice of identifying "potentially productive lines of inquiry related to gender issues in academe," namely the mentoring of women to be successful in higher education without socializing them to static systems of control (Haring, 1998, p. 43). We need to find ways to use faculty-student support groups that will impact university systems by promoting gender awareness and inclusion through reciprocal learning across human differences.

Historically, women have been excluded from universities and hence relationships as both mentors and protégés. Mertz (1987) suggests four possibilities to explain why male mentors have typically chosen not to mentor women. First, is the issue of "fit." According to Fleming (1991), "mentors are likely to choose protégés who are similar to themselves" (p. 29). Given that the majority of leadership positions within most professions, including education, have been held by men until recently, those benefiting from having a mentor have also been male (Sandler, 1995). The second issue is one of risk. A sexual connotation can be easily attached to the male-female relationship (Fleming, 1991). The third issue is one of predictability. Professional women are viewed as an "unknown quantity," and mentoring them is therefore perceived as disrupting "business as usual" (Fleming, p. 31). Fourth, mentors have traditionally expected a "pay-off" in terms of producing a successful protégé. Women are generally perceived to be a poor investment because they are thought to give priority attention to their personal lives (Webster, 1989).

Research supports the benefits of having a mentor and so women need to be proactive in seeking mentors and establishing networks. However, such a search remains problematic for female academics in their roles both as mentors and protégés. Heinrich (1995) asserts that female doctoral students seeking mentors are "more likely to choose male professors with higher ranks and salaries, more power, influence, and professional connections than female professors" (p. 48). Obviously, such practice typically excludes women as mentors and can lead to disappointment for mentees as well. Female dependency on the patronage of male mentors can occur within such directive relationships (Jipson & Munro, 1997).

Female doctoral students who seek relationships with female mentors are sometimes disappointed too (Heinrich, 1995). Mentoring dyads made up of women can produce two types of negative relationships. Heinrich terms the first type "iron maiden advisors–handmaiden advisees" (p. 453). Here, it was found that mentors "played by patriarchal rules, used their legitimate power for their own ends, focused on the task to the exclusion of the interpersonal dimension, and used direct confrontation to deal with conflict with advisees and associate advisors" (p. 454). Conversely, the second pattern identified was that of "negative mother advisors" (Heinrich, p. 455). While women advisees considered these advisors to be "supportive," there was an overemphasis on maintaining the personal element and avoiding confrontation within the mentoring dyad. In both cases, we wonder if the protégé would be likely to perpetuate the same (negative) mentoring behavior. Mullen and Dalton (1996) respond that doctoral students, like faculty, are "socialized to act as sharks, [but] without power and status (relative to bigger fish) graduate students are baited to work beyond their own immediate agendas for the sake of opportunity, reward, and other special privileges" (p. 59).

Are there instances of women mentoring women that do work? If so, what are the strengths of mentoring relationships shared by women? By all accounts, little is known. We do know that women seem to experience different realities from men both in school and at work (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), and within the university setting (Jipson & Munro, 1997). One of the primary functions of mentors is to

provide a realistic view of a profession and to help protégés adjust when expectations differ from real-life contexts (Reilly & Welch, 1994/1995). For example, women academics struggle with the issue of "intellectual and social isolation" in their work environments (Wunsch, 1993, p. 352). Certainly, the need for providing affective and more inclusive forms of support becomes essential from this point of view.

We also know that women tend to express different needs as mentor and mentee from their male counterparts. Studies suggest that women seek both personal and professional nurturance in mentoring relationships while male mentors and protégés focus more exclusively on vocational skills (Heinrich). Saltzman (1996) reports that women need career-oriented advice to assist them in dealing with frustrations involving work and family. Our support group recognized the complicated "balancing act" required of women (Gawalek, Mulqueen, & Tarule, 1994). As a senior member expressed: "Even while at work, women carry with them a mental involvement with their families during the workday. They call home and they even jot chores related to family on their office calendars." While the blending of work with other facets of life has been viewed primarily as a drawback, feminist research upholds value in overlapping the personal with the professional. Gender-sensitive relationships can promote the balancing of task with the interpersonal dimension (Heinrich). Importantly, women indicate that their career development is dependent on this very opportunity to foster personal growth in professional contexts (Krupp, 1992).

## Formalized Mentoring Programs and Outcomes

Mentoring must be institutionally formalized to meet the special academic needs of females and males (Wunsch, 1993) as well as of different professional groups, such as university and school practitioners (Mullen & Lick, in press). Such mentoring programs offer advantages over informal mentoring by providing greater opportunities for protégés to find or to become a mentor. Additionally, they help ensure that women, teachers, and minorities will not be excluded from the mentoring process (Fleming, 1991). Co-mentoring provided our answer to what Nixon (1996) calls the "crisis of

professional self-identity" within higher education which "highlights the vulnerability of university teachers as an occupational group" (p. 5). Although we, the faculty-support group, did not begin as a formalized mentoring network, our learning process can be studied as such.

The support group enabled us to reconceptualize and practice our roles and relationships as co-mentors despite the dysfunctionality experienced in our daily contexts. In short, we found an "intellectual home" that provided its own kind of tension--each of us was responsible for taking risks. Not everyone was comfortable with having his or her tacitly held ideas and assumptions exposed, examined, at times opposed, and sometimes counterbalanced with other perspectives. We aimed to practice turn-taking in questioning and sought other ways to also enhance partnership learning. Diamond and Mullen (1997) offer text-based strategies for making dialogue explicit between supervisors and dissertation candidates who aim to co-mentor through shared research agendas. We also wrote reflectively and responded to each other's contributions to develop a collective focus. However, these efforts varied from individual to individual.

Forming a group of co-mentors offered a number of distinct advantages over mentoring dyads that typically isolate protégés (Sandler, 1995). Other faculty-student support groups (e.g., Cole & Hunt, 1994) stimulated critical thought on how to establish a strong mentoring network. Primary benefits for our group included the availability of multiple perspectives on educational topics and enhancement of professional skills. Connections expanded as mentoring stories were exchanged. No one person was responsible for supporting protégés. Everyone shared knowledge, pedagogical technique, and a sense of collegiality. We also experienced renewed enthusiasm and the capacity to make desirable changes.

A strong co-mentoring group of teacher educators, teachers, and administrators has recently emerged that has identified various elements that facilitate and hinder collaborative work aimed at joint research and publication. A post-assessment conducted collaboratively by the Florida-based school-university Partnership Support Group identified nine dimensions of facilitation: co-mentoring, openness, storytelling, leadership, active listening, fieldnotes, mutual support, appreciative understanding, and

structured inquiry. Six areas were viewed as having hindered the positive result produced: uneven meeting attendance; conflicting responsibilities; varying degrees of commitment; confusion between story and inquiry; range in individual writing effort; and extensive editorial work. Notably, members found it easier to generate the list of benefits (Mullen, in press; Mullen & Lick, in press).

The community of learners that we became was fluid, growing from and into a network resulting from the commitment to seek and deepen support--regardless of consequences at institutional levels. Ironically, our commitment to co-mentoring grew as much from negative as from positive mentoring experiences. Problematic mentoring included reflections by an African American professor whose talents had gone unrecognized during her school years. As another example, some of the doctoral students felt compelled to advance their mentors' research agendas and projects, placing in jeopardy their own. As a parallel situation, Mullen (in press) documents how teachers in school-university systems must publish in order to obtain tenure and promotion and so are similarly placed in a compromising position vis-à-vis teacher educators' research agendas.

Although student (but not faculty) support groups were available in our college, they had not met the particular needs of our participants. As a group of individuals whose knowledge represented different career stages, our learning across rank/status was vital. Members sought ways to become informed about professional development issues at their own, and at different, levels. Those typically in the mentor role, such as dissertation supervisors, were also able to be mentored and vice-versa. Precisely because we had known hardship in being mentored, we sought expansive and fulfilling opportunities to become mentors who could inspire.

A salient feature of co-mentoring groups is that members are encouraged to assume the interrelated roles of mentor and protégé, to nurture and to be nurtured (Bona et al., 1995). Serving as a mentor and/or being mentored can occur simultaneously or at different times in the support group and during one's career. Not only the practice of reciprocal learning but specifically of participating in co-mentoring groups provides alternatives to the fairly static roles assumed in traditional mentoring dyads.

In larger formations, mentors are offered opportunities for learning from protégés and their new information and fresh insights (Krupp, 1992). Like Feuerverger and Mullen (1995), we found that "Women who collaborate, like ourselves, may be immersed in co-mentorship as we engage in relational storytelling and writing, and in the development of self-identity" (p. 228).

Our group relieved senior mentors from the pressure of having to constantly offer expertise. They appreciated being cared for in return and they also benefited from being mentored. Experienced faculty wrote reflective material based on their own development as mentors and leaders, but they also felt challenged by this writing paradigm. Their contributions subsequently emerged more gradually; they had felt more inclined to respond to others' writings. They also encouraged reflection on our shared focus by facilitating conference proposal writing and joint presentation. Mentoring support systems are generally recognized as needed when individuals begin teaching, enroll in graduate programs, and move through professorial ranks, but experienced faculty also require support. For case examples of how faculty at different career stages within a school-university system both functioned and benefited as a formalized publishing group of co-mentors, see Mullen (in press) and Mullen & Lick (in press).

Certainly, students in the university-based group turned to the professors for guidance, especially given the insufficient support they found to be characteristic of their context. As one student participant asserted:

> There is a political line drawn in the college of education between quantitative and qualitative research. The qualitative research paradigm is considered female (second-class) by those holding the power to approve dissertations. Several times, I have attended class only to be told that my research paradigm is not 'good research.' One professor told us to do a good 85-page dissertation, otherwise our research would not be endorsed.

Another student narrated her motivation for joining the group in this way:

> I needed to get to know more professors in order to find those who could eventually function as my committee members. The writing group came together during my first semester to talk and

later to become a group of co-mentors. This group became important to me--enough to drive 90 minutes for meetings. These co-mentors continue to serve as my net, encouraging me to walk across the tightrope to the other side with my doctorate.

Carol Mullen, the first author of this article who is a professor, guided individuals to write research-based mentoring stories of publishable quality. Co-author April Whatley (a beginning professor/former student), encouraged clarification of the "personal" in such educational stories. And, co-author William Kealy (a professor) helped to develop our holistic guide (Figure 1) and philosophical system of mentoring on a larger scale (see section, "Mentoring as a holistic life-system").

## Challenges to and Benefits of the Support Group Effort

Not all mentoring relationships function perfectly. They can be fulfilling or even detrimental to the mentor, the protégé, or both. A common obstacle to successful mentoring is suspicion of controversial and new areas of research (Sandler, 1995). In contrast, individuals within support groups have more say in determining the research inquiry and method they wish to pursue, and in establishing what kind of help they need and how to get it. Our group was able to openly voice concerns, express needs, and change direction without fear of being excluded or damaging a single, all-important relationship. Without an exclusive interest in the research direction of particular individuals, or in the need to evaluate formally, we could more freely explore our own interests. However, our efforts were intercepted.

Unfortunately, controversy aroused by the efforts of support groups is not atypical. The creation of groups within larger organizational structures (such as colleges of education) is suspect; if the members do not represent the mainstream philosophy of the institution (as ours did not), the group may be perceived as a threat (Smith, 1997). Furthermore, when women form mentoring groups, it appears that their "male colleagues and superiors are indifferent, at best" (Saltzman, 1996, p. 51), and hostility can result. We attempted to ease widespread concerns by being inclusive. For example, an invitation was sent college-wide announcing the formation of a new faculty-student support group. Participants

placed themselves at risk by joining an unauthorized group that inadvertently aroused political reactions. For various reasons, we each already occupied a tenuous space within the university--membership only served to magnify our precarious state. Additionally, individuals expressing objections chose to remain at a distance. It is precisely this kind of reaction that heightens the demand for organized mentoring efforts and programs, especially for women and minorities (Fleming, 1991).

But do females in academia value organized mentoring groups and relationships? Some researchers tell us that females are more comfortable with creating connections and forming a collective identity than are males (Dillard, 1995; Gilligan, 1982). Whatever the impact of gender on mentoring dynamics might be, we, the female and male participants, learned that we had a strong desire to work together as a group. We did note, however, that the female members responded differently to the pressures of being perceived as "border crossers" and of somehow violating rules of institutional legitimacy. The tendency of the females to function more comfortably on the periphery of our department and college inadventently shaped the "core" membership and gender of the group. However, these understandings are too tentative and context-bound to be posited as findings; they will therefore need to be subjected to the critical reflections of other collegial support groups in higher education.

Our co-mentoring circle continues to provide guidance in a myriad of ways although our methods have changed to accommodate new geographic locations. Research is needed regarding how mentoring relationships develop, endure, die, or change over time as well as the role and impact of past mentoring on new teaching/learning relationships and networks (Kealy & Mullen, 1999). Traditional mentoring dyads may result in separation of mentor and protégé where, for instance, the latter's advancement in career becomes paramount or where the mentor's limitations become a barrier to collaboration (Fleming, 1991).

In contrast, progressive forms of mentoring support a lifelong perspective on learning. A supportive environment will allow individuals to develop their professional skills and deepen their capacity for learning from each other; for building on what is heard; for seeking co-mentoring

opportunities, and for sharing with wider communities. In this context, the very notion of mentor is problematic: ". . . to be an authentic mentor, the teacher [or mentor] should not adopt the role of mentor. . . . authentic practice . . . resides in the fact that the mentor refuses to take control of the life dreams, and aspirations of the mentee" (Freire, 1997, p. 324).

Currently, our support group is in tremendous flux as participants return to public education, complete dissertations, and assume beginning or advanced faculty positions and new administrative posts. Even our family lives are becoming reconfigured. Finding new ways to extend opportunities for collegial work poses ongoing challenges. Our most effective mode of staying in relationship has been through electronic support. The continued life of the support group has afforded us, the co-authors, the opportunity this article represents to articulate and demystify aspects of co-mentoring in higher education.

The faculty-student support group can prove to be a viable context for identifying salient mentoring themes; for envisioning them in constructive and holistic terms, and for experimenting with role-playing as co-mentors. Individuals role-played within our group by selecting admirable qualities and skills from one another. Gluing together this collage of characteristics--juxtaposed against who we are each becoming--supports our pursuit of a flexible mentor identity. We also found that a change in the strategy of protégés who actively co-mentor occurs. As co-inquirers, the attention of protégés shifts from self-preoccupation towards enabling others (Kerry & Shelton Mayes, 1995); conversely, mentors who become co-inquirers shift from enabling others to also engaging in reflective self-study. In general, innovative mentoring programs can satisfy the needs of individuals across differences, but they must also have "visibility, administrative support, and just enough structure to facilitate worthwhile activities and to motivate participants to spend valuable time with one another" (Wunsch, 1993, p. 360).

Redefining traditional mentoring through the support group effort has compelling implications for higher education. We learned these critical lessons: First, an expanded definition of mentoring can facilitate mentor identity development and deepen the capacity for human connection. Second, an

understanding of broader socialization patterns can make explicit issues of mentorship and identity formation. Third, a focus on self-study with others can create conditions for heightened motivation and ongoing learning. Fourth, the ability to respond more effectively becomes strengthened when educators engage in the kinds of supportive relationships they desire. Fifth, educators can learn how to participate constructively in the delicate issue of others' exposed selves and sensitivities. Finally, reflection and analysis can be practiced, helping individuals to emerge as better prepared visionaries. Taken together, these outgrowths in development helped prepare us for viewing mentoring on a larger scale.

## Mentoring as a Holistic Life-System

Mentoring can be studied as a lifelong pursuit of the "learning . . . process [that] should not stop at the edge of the campus" (Simpson, 1997, p. 250). Mentoring beyond the temporary state is a process that occurs throughout life that brings mentors and mentees close together, but not always. While intensity of contact is part of the experiential basis of learning, so too are halts and even ruptures in communication.

---

Insert Figure 1 about here

---

The smaller and bigger circles of this open-ended framework offer a holistic view of mentoring as a life-system. Each of our group members was influenced by this guide as a whole and more directly by some or all of its elements representing phases in mentoring. At times, the view taken by us of mentoring was contextual and personal; the "texture" of situations and feelings was emphasized. Translated graphically, peak in contact (upper right element) represents those heightened interpersonal dynamics shared between individuals and within groups. This is where reflections on a smaller scale bring us close to the toil and tensions of mentors and protégés. As mentoring contact increases through structured activities (e.g., peer coaching, collaborative research, and co-authored writing), the outline of the tighter, textured circle thickens, representing a peaked experience. The circle also thickens when

sticky political or bureaucratic issues seem beyond one's control. In this article we addressed what can happen as the circle thickens, contact intensifies, and inner and outer circles merge or become entangled.

Constant communication (upper-middle right element) can also characterize short- and long-term mentoring relationships and programs. A relationship that is beginning to be articulated in mentoring terms is accompanied by emerging stories (middle element). The braided, woven area (representing mentoring mosaic) connotes the interaction of the protégé with multiple mentoring figures. Head, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall (1992) suggest optimizing the functions of mentoring by developing a "mentoring mosaic" that taps other resources--a network of secondary mentors--to address shortcomings in the primary mentor-mentee dyad. Halted or dissolving communication, or even severed communication, can also characterize phases of mentoring relationships. However, communication problems in mentoring relationships and systems need to be somehow overcome or resolved in order for promising cycles to emerge.

The cycles within cycles ("shadowed coils" and "increasing coil size" at center) suggest density of experience. Herein mentoring stories have yet to emerge and to perhaps influence change within educational systems. For example, such stories of the shadows include the potential for graduate students, minorities, and teachers to perform as co-mentors with faculty (e.g., teacher educators) and for co-mentorship to become a formally recognized role. The coils are shadowed to suggest their association with private or covert activity that may be sociopolitical in nature, cause, or effect. The illustration honors these and other elements relevant to the mentor identity development of students and faculty.

The larger bottom circle (and entire figure) illustrates an ebb and flow of mentoring as changes occur with the specific needs of mentors and protégés. The visual itself suggests a bigger picture related to cycles of life, organizational cultures, and historical movements. Regardless of whether elements evoke a "close up" or "distanced" view of mentoring, specific and general understandings can be ventured.

The mentoring guide is not a model or template but rather a nonsequential representation of interconnected images. The visual does not have a beginning or end. It must be subjected to the reader's interpretations and contexts to be "read" and hence used as a guide. Many educators have learned and taught in settings that have had pieces of this model in operation. Its smaller and larger circles represent phases and cycles of mentoring at the levels of human and organizational systems. As such, mentorship is viewed not so much as an event but as an ongoing process that, like education, marriage, and worship, has the potential to become a fundamental component of living.

With a view of mentoring as a lifelong process that involves many different but often related aspects, a broader perspective can be gained of seemingly contradictory experiences. When elevated through a reflective agenda, mentoring processes can be viewed less disjointedly, or more coherently and expansively. Reflecting on this lifelong learning process, Mullen and Kealy (in press) write that

> With lifelong learning being an integral part of each person's life, what "learning model or models" might be especially effective to greatly enhance continuous learning? One such powerful approach is that of lifelong mentoring. . . . We define the concept of lifelong mentoring as the process of continually seeking, finding, and reconstructing mentoring and comentoring relationships through which one can become enabled, empowered, and self-actualized.

## Widening the Circle: Mentoring on a Larger Scale

Faculty and students who pursue being self-actualized "actively investigate their own practice [thereby] demonstrat[ing] how educators can powerfully influence wider commitment to social renewal. . . . So the ripples spread outward" (McNiff, 1997, p. 13). Should self-study co-mentoring groups thrive, participants will be challenged to have an impact beyond their own immediate contexts. They must reach out to newcomers to contribute to the work-in-progress, the unfinished symphony of mentorship. University-based support groups have an obligation to assist others in responding creatively to rapidly changing sociocultural contexts that characterize higher education at the turn of this century. Educators

widen the circle of their individual practices when they develop co-mentoring groups that bring together people across institutional and cultural differences. Educators and others benefit from such actions that can help them to view and pursue mentoring experiences on a larger scale.

## Authors' Notes

[1]A much earlier version of Figure 1 appears in Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue's (1997) edited book.

[2]All participant quotes are from Breaking the Circle of One (Mullen et al., 1997), the published book that resulted directly from the co-mentoring support group combined with the particular efforts of Carol A. Mullen, the editor. We, the co-authors of this article, chose to incorporate other participants' reflections to further substantiate issues of discussion as well as aspects of the group process and its impact. Members are anonymously identified along with the identity of the university institution.

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

Senior Author's address:

Carol A. Mullen

Auburn University

Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology

4036 Haley Center

College of Education

Auburn, AL 36849-5221 USA

## References

Bona, M. J., Rinehart, J., & Volbrecht, R. M. (1995). Show me how to do like you: Co-mentoring as feminist pedagogy. Feminist Teacher, 9(3), 116-124.

Clandinin, D. J., Davies, A., Hogan, P., & Kennard, B. (1993). Learning to teach: Teaching to learn. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cole, A. L., & Hunt, D. E. (Eds.). (1994). The doctoral thesis journey: Reflections from travellers and guides. Toronto: OISE Press.

Diamond, C. P. T., & Mullen, C. A. (1997). Alternative perspectives on mentoring in higher education: Duography as collaborative relationship and inquiry. Journal of Applied Social Behaviour, 3(2), 49-64.

Dillard, C. (1995). Leading with her life: An African American feminist reinterpretation of leadership for an urban high school principal. Educational Administration Quarterly, 3(4), 539-563.

Feuerverger, G., & Mullen, C. A. (1995). Portraits of marginalized lives: Stories of literacy and collaboration in school and prison. Interchange, 26(3), 221-240.

Fleming, K. A. (1991). Mentoring: Is it the key to opening doors for women in educational administration? Education Canada, 27-33.

Freire, P. (1997). A response. In P. Freire, with J. W. Fraser, D. Macedo, T. McKinnon, & W. T. Stokes (Eds), Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Freire (pp. 303-329). New York: Peter Lang.

Gawalek, M. A., Mulqueen, M., & Tarule, J. M. (1994). Woman to women: Understanding the needs of our female students. In S. M. Deats & L. T. Lenker (Eds.), Gender and academe: Feminist pedagogy and politics (pp. 179-198). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hafernik, J. J., Messerschmitt, D. S., & Vandrick, S. (1997). Collaborative research: Why and how? Educational Researcher, 26(9), 31-35.

Hardigg, V. (1995, December). Gypsy profs: They are underemployed academics who find they must string together teaching posts. America's Best Graduate Schools, 72.

Haring, M. J. (1998). Response to "A woman's name: Implications for publication, citation, and tenure." Educational Researcher, 27(8), 43.

Head, F. A., Reiman, A. J., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1992). The reality of mentoring: Complexity in its process and function. In T. M. Bey & C. T. Holmes (Eds.), Mentoring: Contemporary principles and issues. Reston, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.

Heinrich, K. T. (1995). Doctoral advisement relationships between women: On friendship and betrayal. Journal of Higher Education, 66(4), 447-469.

Jipson, J. A., & Munro, P. (1997). Deconstructing wo/mentoring: Diving into the abyss. In J. Jipson & N. Paley (Eds.), Daredevil research: Re-creating analytic practice (pp. 201-217). New York: Peter Lang.

Kealy, W. A., & Mullen, C. A. (1999). "From the next scale up": Using graphic arts as an opening to mentoring. In C. T. P. Diamond & C. A. Mullen (Eds.), The postmodern educator: Arts-based inquiries and teacher development (pp. 375-396). New York: Peter Lang.

Kerry, T., & Shelton Mayes, A. (Eds.). (1995). Issues in mentoring. London: Routledge.

Krupp, J. (1992). Planned career mentoring. Mentoring International, 6(1/2), 3-12.

Little, J. W. (1990). The mentor phenomenon and the social organization of teaching. Review of Research in Education, 16, 297-351.

Luke, A. (1994). On reading and the sexual division of literacy. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 26(4), 361-81.

McNiff, J. (1997). Seven generations on: Action research, social change, and the responsibility of educators. Journal of Professional Studies, 4(2), 8-14.

Mertz, N. T. (1987). Why women aren't mentored. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Portland, OR.

Mullen, C. A., & Dalton, J. E. (1996). Dancing with sharks: On becoming socialized teacher-educator researchers. Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, I, 55–71.

Mullen, C. A., Cox, M. D., Boettcher, C. K., & Adoue, D. S. (Eds.). (1997). Breaking the circle of one: Redefining mentorship in the lives and writings of educators. New York: Peter Lang. (Counterpoints Series)

Mullen, C. A. (in press). Innovations in mentoring: Creating partnership links in a Florida school-university collaborative. Florida Journal of Educational Research.

Mullen, C. A., & W. A. Kealy. (in press). Lifelong mentoring: The creation of learning relationships. In C. A. Mullen & D. W. Lick (Eds.), New directions for mentoring: Creating a culture of synergy. London, England: Falmer Press.

Mullen, C. A., & Lick, D. W. (in press). New directions for mentoring: Creating a culture of synergy. London, England: Falmer Press.

Nixon, J. (1996). Professional identity and the restructuring of higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 21(1), 5-16.

Noddings, N. (1995). Philosophy of education. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Reilly, J. M., & Welch, D. B. (1994/1995). Mentoring gifted young women: A call to action. Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 6(2), 120-128.

Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). Failing at fairness: How our schools cheat girls. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Salmon, P. (1992). Achieving a PhD–ten students' experiences. Oakhill, Staffordshire: Trentham.

Saltzman, A. (1996, March 25). Woman versus woman: Why aren't more female executives mentoring their junior counterparts? U. S. News & World Report, pp. 50-53.

Sandler, B. R. (1995). Women as mentors: Myths and commandments. Educational Horizons, 7(2), 105-107.

Sands, R. G., Parson, L. A., & Duane, J. (1991). Faculty mentoring faculty in a public university. Journal of Higher Education, 62(2), 174-193.

Selke, M. J., & Wong, T. D. (1993). The mentoring-empowered model: Facilitating communication in graduate advisement. Paper presented at the Conference of the National Academic Advising Association, Bloomington, MN.

Simpson, R. D. (1997). Faculty roles and rewards. Innovative Higher Education, 21(4), 249-251.

Slavin, R. E. (1995). Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Smith, J. K. (1997). The stories educational researchers tell about themselves. Educational Researcher, 26(5), 4-11.

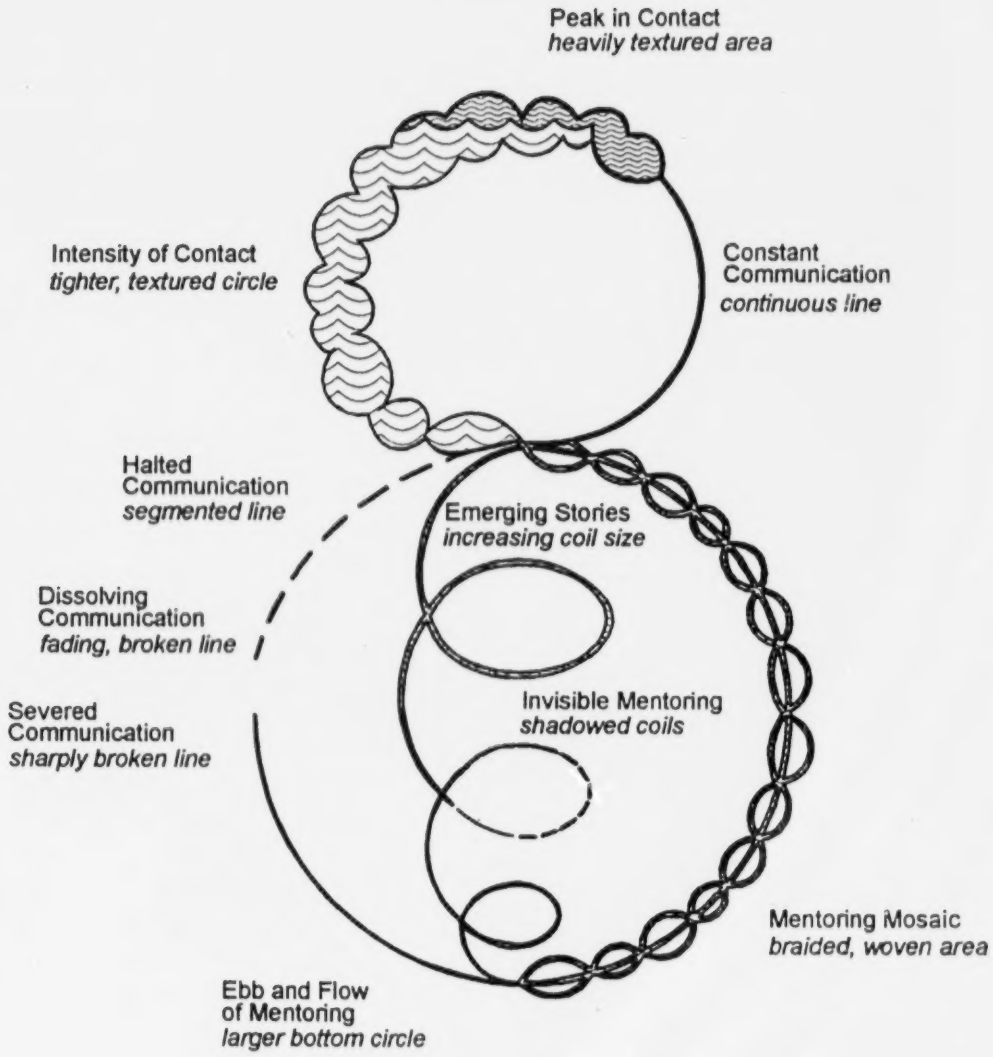
Smith, P. L., & Smits, S. J. (1994). The feminization of leadership? Training & Development, 48(2), 43-46.

Webster, B. D. (1989). Opening doors for women in academia. BioScience, 39(2), 96-98.

Wunsch, M. A. (1993). Mentoring probationary women academics: A pilot programme for career development. Studies in Higher Education, 18(3), 349-362.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. A Holistic Life-System of Mentoring Phases and Cycles.


Peak in Contact
heavily textured area
Intensity of Contact
tighter, textured circle
Constant
Communication
continuous line
Halted
Communication
segmented line
Emerging Stories
increasing coil size
Dissolving
Communication
fading, broken line
Invisible Mentoring
shadowed coils
Severed
Communication
sharply broken line
Mentoring Mosaic
braided, woven area
Ebb and Flow
of Mentoring
larger bottom circle